

(19) World Intellectual Property Organization
International Bureau



(43) International Publication Date
11 April 2002 (11.04.2002)

PCT

(10) International Publication Number
WO 02/28490 A1

(51) International Patent Classification⁷: A63B 53/04, 53/06, 53/08

(21) International Application Number: PCT/US01/29597

(22) International Filing Date:
19 September 2001 (19.09.2001)

(25) Filing Language: English

(26) Publication Language: English

(30) Priority Data:
09/678,942 3 October 2000 (03.10.2000) US

(81) Designated States (*national*): AE, AG, AL, AM, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BR, BY, BZ, CA, CH, CN, CO, CR, CU, CZ, DE, DK, DM, DZ, EC, EE, ES, FI, GB, GD, GE, GH, GM, HR, HU, ID, IL, IN, IS, JP, KE, KG, KP, KR, KZ, LC, LK, LR, LS, LT, LU, LV, MA, MD, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, MZ, NO, NZ, PL, PT, RO, RU, SD, SE, SG, SI, SK, SL, TJ, TM, TR, TT, TZ, UA, UG, UZ, VN, YU, ZA, ZW.

(84) Designated States (*regional*): ARIPO patent (GH, GM, KE, LS, MW, MZ, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZW), Eurasian patent (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European patent (AT, BE, CH, CY, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, IE, IT, LU, MC, NL, PT, SE, TR), OAPI patent (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GQ, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).

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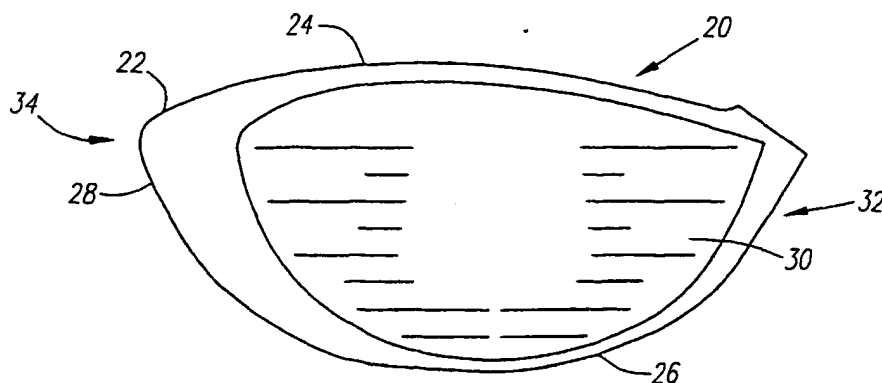
Published:
— with international search report

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For two-letter codes and other abbreviations, refer to the "Guidance Notes on Codes and Abbreviations" appearing at the beginning of each regular issue of the PCT Gazette.

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(54) Title: GOLF CLUB HEAD WITH COATED STRIKING PLATE



(57) Abstract: A golf club head (20) having a thin striking plate (30) with a smooth exterior surface and a thin layer (35) disposed on the exterior surface (53). The thin layer (35) has a plurality of scorelines (75) that absorb the shock during impact with a golf ball. The striking plate (30) has a thickness in the range of 0.010 inch to 0.200 inch, and the thin layer (35) has a thickness in the range of 9.993 inch to 0.050 inch. The striking plate (30) may have a uniform thickness or a variable thickness.

Title

GOLF CLUB HEAD WITH COATED STRIKING PLATE

5

Technical Field

The present invention relates to a golf club having a relatively thin striking plate. More specifically, the present invention relates to a golf club having a thin striking plate with a coating on the exterior surface of the striking plate.

10

Background Art

Present golf clubs have repositioned weight in order to lower the center of gravity for better performance. This repositioning of weight has for the most part attempted to thin the crown and striking plate of the golf club while precisely placing the weight in the sole of the golf club. However, thinning the striking plate too much may lead to failure of the golf club.

15

When the striking plate impacts a golf ball during a swing, large impact forces (in excess of 2000 pounds) are produced thereby loading the striking plate. In the relatively thin striking plates of hollow metal woods and cavity-back irons, these forces tend to produce large internal stresses in the striking plate. These internal stresses often cause catastrophic material cracking which leads to failure of the club head.

20

Computational and experimental studies on hollow metal woods and cavity-backed irons have demonstrated that such catastrophic material cracking most often

occurs at impact points on the striking plate. These impact points require added strength to prevent club head failure.

In designing golf club heads, the striking plate must be structurally adequate to withstand large repeated forces such as those associated with impacting a golf ball at high speeds. Such structural adequacy may be achieved by increasing the striking plate stiffness so that the stress levels are below the critical stress levels of the material used in the striking plate. Typically, for metal woods, the striking plates are stiffened by uniformly increasing the thickness of the striking plate and/or by adding one or more ribs to the interior surface of the striking plate.

10 Uniformly increasing the thickness of the striking plate portion typically requires the addition of large amounts of material to adequately reduce the stress sufficient to prevent impact and/or fatigue cracking. However, the addition of such a large amount of material to a striking plate generally adversely affects the performance of the golf club.

15 One of the first patents to disclose variable face thickness was U.S. Patent Number 5,318,300 to Schmidt et al., for a Metal Wood Golf Club With Variable Faceplate Thickness which was filed on November 2, 1992. Schmidt et al discloses thickening the faceplate to prevent cracking.

 A further disclosure of variable face thickness is disclosed in U.S. Patent
20 Number 5,830,084 to Kosmatka for a Contoured Golf Club Face which was filed on October 23, 1996. Kosmatka addresses contouring the face to thicken certain regions

while thinning other regions depending on the stress load experienced by such regions.

Kosmatka also discloses a method for designing a face plate according to measured stress levels experienced during impact with a golf ball. Kosmatka, U.S. Patent

Number 5,971,868 for a Contoured Back Surface Of Golf Club Face, filed on

5 November 18, 1997, discloses similar contouring for an iron.

A more recent disclosure is Noble et al., U.S. Patent Number 5,954,596, for a Golf Club Head With Reinforced Front Wall, which was filed on December 4, 1997.

Noble et al. discloses a face plate with the thickness portion at the geometric center, and gradually decreasing toward the top and bottom, and the sole and heel. The top and
10 bottom ends along a line through geometric center have the same thickness, and the heel and sole ends along a line through geometric center have the same thickness.

Other references make partial disclosure of varying face thickness. One example is FIG. 8 of U.S. Patent Number 5,505,453 which illustrates an interior surface of a face with a bulging center and decreasing thickness towards the heel and sole ends,
15 similar to Noble et al. Another example is FIGS. 4C and 4D of U.S. Patent Number 5,346,216 which discloses a bulging center that decreases in thickness toward the heel and sole ends, and the top and bottom end of the face, similar to Noble et al. However, the prior art has failed to design a striking plate or face plate that is thin and reduces scoreline concentration of the initial shock load during impact with a golf ball.

20

Disclosure of the Invention

The present invention is directed at a golf club head having a thin striking plate that has a smooth exterior surface with a thin layer disposed on the exterior surface.

The thin layer has a plurality of scorelines to absorb the initial shock load during impact
5 with a golf ball and to distribute and reduce stress loads in the body of the golf club head.

One aspect of the present invention is a golf club head including a body, a striking plate and a thin layer. The body has a crown, a sole, a heel end, a toe end and a hollow interior. The striking plate is attached to the body. The striking plate has an
10 interior surface facing toward the hollow interior and a smooth exterior surface opposite the interior surface. The striking plate has a thickness range of 0.010 inch to 0.200 inch. The thin layer is disposed on the exterior surface of the striking plate. The thin layer has a thickness of 0.005 inch to 0.100 inch, and can have a plurality of scorelines.

Another aspect of the present invention is a golf club head including a body, a
15 striking plate and a thin layer. The body has a crown, a sole, a heel end, a toe end and a hollow interior. The striking plate is attached to the body and has a non-uniform or contour interior surface. The striking plate has an interior surface toward the hollow interior and a smooth exterior surface opposite the interior surface. The striking plate also has a central region, a transition region, a first peripheral region and a second
20 peripheral region. The central region has a first thickness ranging from 0.125 inch to 0.145 inch and occupying 5% to 15% of the exterior surface of a core face area. The

transition region encompasses the central region and occupies 35% to 50% of the exterior surface of a core face area. The first peripheral region encompasses the transition region and occupies 40% to 55% of the exterior surface of the core face. The first peripheral region has a second thickness less than the first thickness and ranges from 0.075 inch to 0.110 inch. The transition region has a thickness that transitions from the first thickness to the second thickness. The second peripheral region encompasses the first peripheral region and has a third thickness that ranges from 0.045 inch to 0.080 inch. The thin layer is disposed on the exterior surface of the striking plate. The thin layer has a thickness of 0.005 inch to 0.100 inch, and has a plurality of scorelines.

Brief Description of the Drawings

FIG. 1 is a front plan view of a golf club head with the striking plate of the present invention.

FIG. 2 is a front plan view of the striking plate of FIG. 1 showing the variable face thickness.

FIG. 2A is a front plan view of the golf club head of FIG. 1 with the variable face thickness pattern superimposed thereon.

FIG. 3 is a toe side view of the golf club head of FIG. 1.

FIG. 3A is a toe side exploded view of the golf club head of the present invention.

FIG. 3B is a toe side exploded view of an alternative embodiment of the golf club head of the present invention.

FIG. 4 is a bottom plan view of the golf club head of FIG. 1.

FIG. 5 is a top plan view of the golf club head of FIG. 1.

5 FIG. 6 is a heel side view of the golf club head of FIG. 1.

FIG. 7 is a front plan view of a fairway wood golf club head of the present invention with the variable thickness superimposed thereon.

FIG. 8 is a cross-sectional view along lines 8-8 of FIG. 5.

FIG. 9 is a cross-sectional view along lines 9-9 of FIG. 2A.

10 FIG. 10 is a cross-sectional view along lines 10-10 of FIG. 2A.

FIG. 11 is a cross-sectional view along lines 11-11 of FIG. 2A.

FIG. 12 is a cross-sectional view along lines 12-12 of FIG. 2A.

FIG. 13 is a cross-sectional view along lines 13-13 of FIG. 2A.

FIG. 14 is a cross-sectional view along lines 14-14 of FIG. 2A.

15 FIG. 15 is a cross-sectional view along lines 15-15 of FIG. 2A.

FIG. 16 is a cross-sectional view along lines 16-16 of FIG. 2A.

FIG. 17 is an illustration of impact probabilities for high handicap golfers.

FIG. 18 is an illustration of impact probabilities for low handicap golfers.

20 FIG. 19 is a side view of a golf ball impacting the golf club head of the present invention.

Best Mode(s) For Carrying Out the Invention

As shown in FIGS. 1-8, a golf club head is generally designated 20. The golf club head 20 has a body 22 with a crown 24, a sole 26, a ribbon 28, a striking plate 30, and a thin layer 35 disposed on the striking plate 30. The striking plate 30 generally extends from a heel end 32 to a toe end 34 of the front of the golf club head 20. The body 22 preferably has an internal hosel 36 for receiving the tip end of a shaft, not shown, through an aperture 38. The golf club head has a body 22 that is preferably composed of a metal material such as titanium, titanium alloy, stainless steel, or the like, and is most preferably composed of a forged titanium material. The body 22 preferably has a large volume, ranging from 250 cubic centimeters to 400 cubic centimeters, most preferably 290 cubic centimeters to 350 cubic centimeters. The body 22 preferably weighs no more than 215 grams, and most preferably weighs between 180 and 205 grams. The body 22 has a hollow interior 23.

The striking plate 30 may have a uniform thickness or a variable thickness. The exterior surface 53 of the striking plate is smooth while the interior surface 55 of the striking plate may be uniform or vary in thickness. The exterior surface also has an absence of scorelines since scorelines are stress concentrators during impact with a golf ball. Due to the extremely thin striking plate 30, scorelines would lead to failure of the striking plate 30. The thickness of the striking plate 30 ranges from 0.010 inch to 0.300, preferably from the 0.040 inch to 0.250, and most preferably from 0.060 inch to 0.150 inch. The thickness of the striking plate 30 is greatly determined by the size of

the golf club head 20, and the material composition of the striking plate 30. Titanium alloys have a lower density than stainless steel, and thus a titanium alloy striking plate 30 allows for the weight to be distributed elsewhere in the body 22.

The thin layer 35 is attached to the exterior surface 53 of the striking plate 30.

- 5 The thin layer 35 has a plurality of scorelines 75 thereon. The thin layer 35 absorbs the initial shock load, distributes the stress loads throughout the entire golf club head 20, and reduces the stress load throughout the entire golf club head 20. The thin layer 35 may cover the entire exterior surface 53, or only a portion of the exterior surface 53. The thin layer 35 has a thickness that ranges from 0.003 inch to 0.050 inch, more
10 preferably from 0.005 inch to 0.025 inch, and most preferably 0.010 inch. The overall thickness of the striking plate 30 and the thin layer 35 preferably ranges from 0.020 inch to 0.250 inch, more preferably from 0.050 inch to 0.150 inch, and most preferably is 0.100 inch.

- The thin layer 35 is preferably composed of a material that has a lower density
15 than the material of the striking plate 30. The thin layer 35 is preferably composed of a polymer material, a composite material, a lightweight metal material, or the like. Polymer materials that are used for the thin layer 35 include polyurethanes, polyamides, polyimides, polycarbonates, and the like. Lightweight metal that are used for the thin layer 35 materials include titanium, aluminum, beryllium, magnesium, zirconium
20 alloys, and the like.

Preferably, the striking plate 30 is partitioned into a plurality of regions 40, 42,

44 and 46, defined by lines 41, 43, 45 and 47, each having a different thickness or different thickness range. The striking plate 30 is unitary in construction, and may or may not be composed of the same material of the body 22. The term unitary when used in conjunction with the striking plate 30 means that the striking plate 30 is a single
5 piece and does not have additions to the interior surface 55 such as ribs or weighting members. The thin layer 35 is a separate component from the striking plate 30. A central region 40, defined by dashed line 41, has a base thickness that is preferably the greatest thickness of the regions 40, 42, 44 and 46. The base thickness ranges from 0.200 inch to 0.060 inch, preferably from 0.150 inch to 0.075 inch, and is most
10 preferably within the range of 0.145 inch to 0.090 inch. A transition region 42 has a thickness that ranges between the thickness of the central region 40 and a first peripheral region 44, preferably ranges from 0.150 inch to 0.090 inch, and most preferably ranges from 0.140 inch to 0.080 inch. The first peripheral region 44 has a thickness that ranges from 0.110 inch to 0.040 inch, preferably ranges from 0.105 inch
15 to 0.050 inch, and most preferably ranges from 0.100 inch to 0.075 inch. A second peripheral region 46 preferably is the thinnest region of the striking plate regions 40, 42, 44 and 46. The second peripheral region 46 has a thickness that ranges from 0.085 inch to 0.010 inch, preferably ranges from 0.080 inch to 0.045 inch, and most preferably ranges from 0.075 inch to 0.050 inch.

20 In a preferred embodiment, as shown in FIG. 2, the central region has a thickness range of 0.145 inch to 0.090 inch, the transition region 42 has a thickness

range of 0.140 inch to 0.080 inch, the first peripheral region 44 has a thickness range of 0.105 inch to 0.090 inch, and the second peripheral region 46 has a thickness range of 0.075 inch to 0.050 inch.

Preferably, as shown in FIG. 2, the central region 40 is 5% to 15% of the surface area of the core face 49 of the striking plate 30. The core face 49 is defined as the central region 40, the transition region 42 and the first peripheral region 44. The core face area of the striking plate 30 has an area between 4.80 square inches and 5.50 square inches, preferably between 5.10 square inches and 5.40 square inches, and most preferably 5.38 square inches. The transition region 42 is preferably 35% to 50% of the surface area of the core face 49, and the first peripheral region 44 is preferably 40% to 55% of the surface area of the core face 49. In a preferred embodiment, the central region is 8.8% of the surface area of the core face 49, the transition region is 42.2% of the surface area of the core face 49, and the first peripheral region 44 is 50% of the surface area of the core face 49.

FIG. 7 illustrates an alternative embodiment of the present invention for a fairway wood golf club head 20. In this embodiment, the central region has a thickness range of 0.135 inch to 0.125 inch, the transition region 42 has a thickness range of 0.130 inch to 0.090 inch, the first peripheral region 44 has a thickness range of 0.095 inch to 0.085 inch, and the second peripheral region 46 has a thickness range of 0.075 inch to 0.045 inch.

Table One sets forth the thickness ranges of the central region 40, the first

peripheral region 44 and the second peripheral region 46 for preferred embodiments for drivers (lofts 7 degrees through 12 degrees) and fairway woods (2 wood through 9 wood).

5

Table One

Striking Plate Thickness			
Club	Second Peripheral Region	First Peripheral Region	Center Region
07° Driver	.050 ± .005	.100 ± .005	.140 ± .005
08° Driver	.050 ± .005	.100 ± .005	.140 ± .005
09° Driver	.050 ± .005	.100 ± .005	.140 ± .005
10° Driver	.050 ± .005	.100 ± .005	.140 ± .005
11° Driver	.050 ± .005	.100 ± .005	.140 ± .005
12° Driver	.050 ± .005	.100 ± .005	.140 ± .005
2 Wood	.050 ± .005	.090 ± .005	.130 ± .005
3 Wood	.055 ± .005	.090 ± .005	.130 ± .005
Strong 3	.060 ± .005	.090 ± .005	.130 ± .005
4 Wood	.060 ± .005	.085 ± .005	.125 ± .005
Strong 4	.065 ± .005	.090 ± .005	.130 ± .005
5 Wood	.065 ± .005	.085 ± .005	.125 ± .005
7 Wood	.070 ± .005	.085 ± .005	.125 ± .005
9 Wood	.075 ± .005	.085 ± .005	.125 ± .005

Cross-sections of the striking plate 30, taken from FIG. 2A, are illustrated in FIGS. 9-16. The striking plate 30 has variable thickness, with the thickest portion in the center. The thin layer 35 has a uniform overall thickness.

10

FIG. 9 illustrates a vertical cross-section of the mid-section of the striking plate 30 with the central region 40, the transition region 42, the first peripheral region 44 and

the second peripheral region 46 on the contoured interior surface 55. FIGS. 10 and 11 illustrate vertical cross-sections that are adjacent both sides of the mid-section, and which only includes the transition region 42, the first peripheral region 44 and the second peripheral region 46. FIG. 12 illustrates a vertical cross-section on the heel end 5 32 of the striking plate 30 that has a wall of the internal hosel 36 integrated therewith in a preferred embodiment. FIG. 12 otherwise shows the first peripheral region 44 and the second peripheral region 46. Although the wall of the internal hosel 36 is shown as integrated with the striking plate 30, alternative embodiments have the internal hosel off-set from the interior surface 55 of the striking plate 30. FIG. 13 illustrates a vertical 10 cross-section of the toe end 34 of the striking plate 30, which only includes the first peripheral region 44 and the second peripheral region 46.

FIG. 14 illustrates a horizontal cross-section of the horizontal mid-section of the striking plate 30, which shows the central region 40, the transition region 42, the first peripheral region 44, the second peripheral region 46, and the wall of the internal hosel 15 36.

FIG. 15 illustrates a horizontal cross-section below the horizontal mid-section of the striking plate 30, which only includes the transition region 42, the first peripheral region 44, the second peripheral region 46, and the wall of the internal hosel 36. FIG. 16 illustrates a horizontal cross-section further below the horizontal mid-section of the 20 striking plate 30, which only includes the first peripheral region 44, the second peripheral region 46, and the wall of the internal hosel 36.

The striking plate 30 does not have scorelines. The plurality of scorelines 75 are disposed on the thin layer 35. The scorelines 75 may be traditional indentations having a depth of from 0.001 inch to 0.025 inch, more preferably from 0.003 inch to 0.010 inch, and most preferably 0.005 inch. Alternatively, the scorelines may be
5 projections 75a such as illustrated in FIG. 3B. Such scoreline projections 75a preferably extend 0.003 inch to 0.010 inch from the surface 39 of the thin layer 35.

As mentioned previously, the thickness of the regions 40, 42, 44 and 46, and for the most part, the thickness of the striking plate 30, corresponds to impact probability. FIGS. 17 and 18 illustrate the impact points during a golf swing for high handicap
10 players and low handicap players, respectively. As shown in FIG. 17, the high handicap players had impacts 90 within an elliptical area 100 that extended through the center of the striking plate 30. In comparison, low handicap players had impacts 90 that were more concentrated and within a circular area 102 of the striking plate 30. These impacts 90 illustrate the points on a striking plate 30 that have the highest
15 probability of undergoing the greatest stress during impact with a golf ball. Therefore, these points require greater thickness than other areas of the striking plate 30. Thus, the regions 40, 42, 44 and 46 correlate to this impact probability in order to design a striking plate with greater thickness where it is needed instead of in areas low impact probability. The present invention may be described as being thinner at the heel and toe
20 ends 32 and 34 than the central region 40.

The variation in the thickness of the striking plate 30 also allows for the

greatest thickness of regions 40, 42, 44 and 46 to be distributed in the center region 40 of the striking plate 30 thereby enhancing the flexibility of the striking plate 30 which corresponds to greater compliance of the striking plate 30 during impact with a golf ball thereby providing for reduced energy loss with allows for greater distance.

- 5 The striking plate 30 is preferably composed of a stainless steel. Alternatively, the striking plate 30 is composed of a titanium or titanium-alloy material. In yet an alternative embodiment, the striking plate 30 is composed of a vitreous metal such as iron-boron, nickel-copper, nickel-zirconium, nickel-phosphorous, and the like. Yet in further alternative embodiments, the striking plate 30 is composed of ceramics,
10 composites or other metals.

 The thin layer 35 is preferably attached to the exterior surface 55 of the striking plate 30 by an adhesive 37, such as illustrated in FIG. 3A. Other means of attachment include vapor deposition, pressure locking, attachment by screws, and the like.

CLAIMS

We claim as our invention:

1. A golf club head comprising:

a body having a crown, a sole, a heel end, a toe end and a hollow

5 interior;

a striking plate attached to the body, the striking plate having an interior surface toward hollow interior and a smooth exterior surface opposite the interior surface, the striking plate having a thickness range of 0.010 inch to 0.200 inch; and

a thin layer disposed on the exterior surface, the thin layer having a
10 thickness of 0.005 inch to 0.100 inch, the thin layer having a plurality of scorelines thereon.

2. The golf club head according to claim 1 wherein each of the plurality of scorelines have a depth of between 0.003 inch and 0.050 inch.

15

3. The golf club head according to claim 1 wherein the thin layer has a thickness range of 0.010 inch to 0.025 inch, and each of the plurality of scorelines have a depth of between 0.005 inch and 0.010 inch.

- 20 4. The golf club head according to claim 1 wherein the striking plate is composed of a material selected from the group consisting of titanium, titanium alloys, steels,

vitreous metals, ceramics, composites, carbon materials, carbon fiber materials, other fibrous materials and mixtures thereof.

5. The golf club head according to claim 1 wherein the body is composed of a
5 material selected from the group consisting of titanium, titanium alloys, stainless steel and composites.
6. The golf club head according to claim 1 wherein the thin layer is composed of a
material selected from the group consisting of thermosetting polymers, thermoplastic
10 polymers and low modulus metals.
7. The golf club head according to claim 6 wherein the thin layer is composed of a thermosetting polyurethane.
- 15 8. The golf club head according to claim 1 wherein the striking plate has an area between 4.80 square inches and 5.40 square inches.
9. The golf club head according to claim 1 wherein each of the plurality of
scorelines is a projection extending outward 0.003 inch to 0.025 inch from a surface of
20 the thin layer.

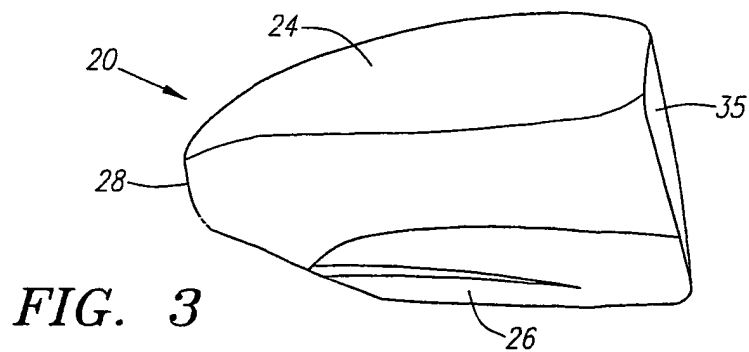
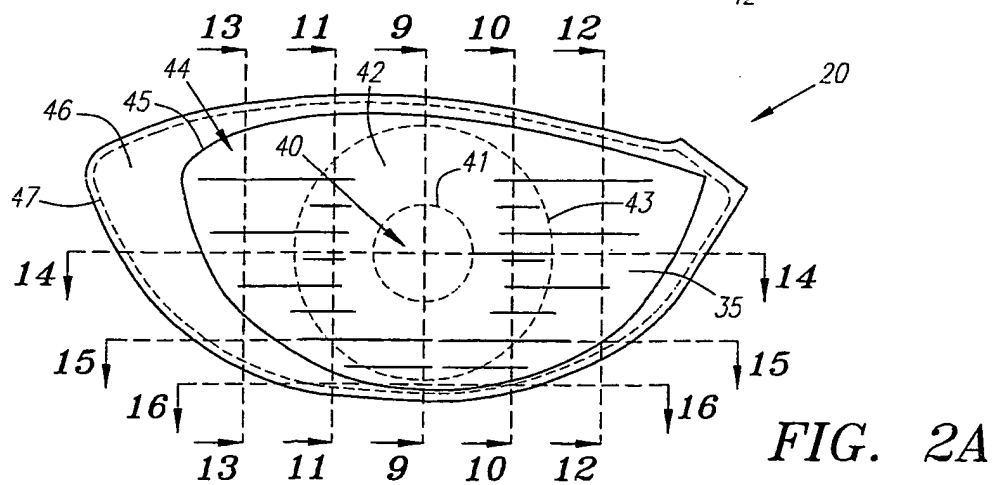
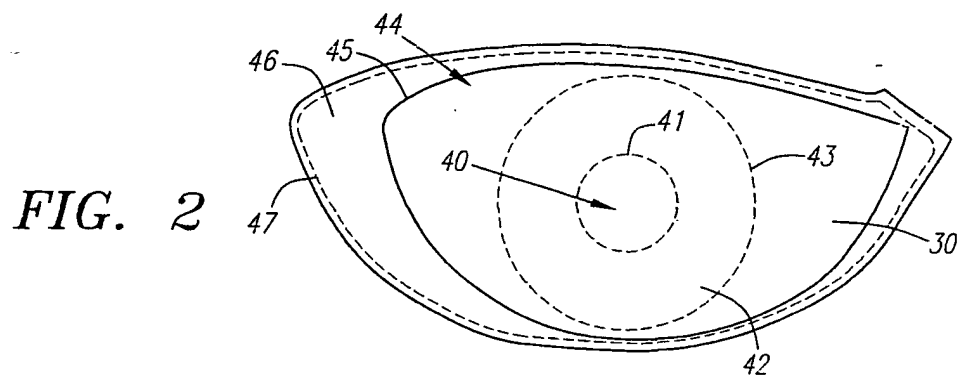
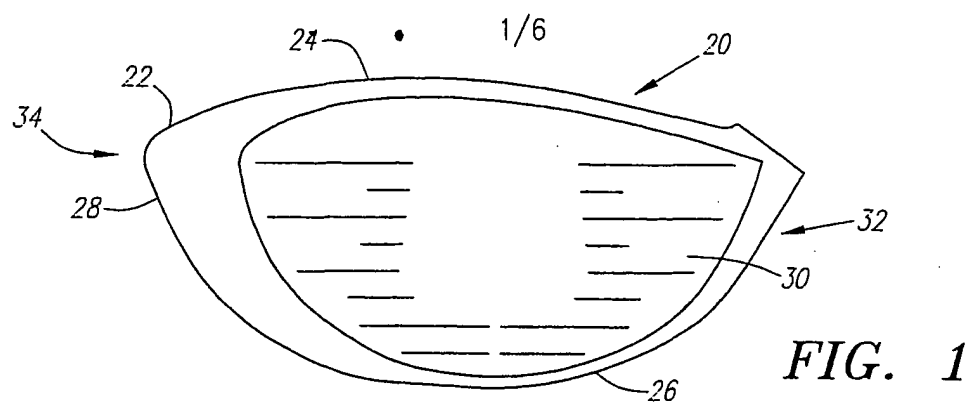
10. A golf club head comprising:

a body having a crown, a sole, a heel end, a toe end and a hollow interior;

a striking plate attached to the body, the striking plate having an interior
5 surface toward the hollow interior and a smooth exterior surface opposite the interior surface, the striking plate also having a central region, a transition region, a first peripheral region and a second peripheral region, the central region having a first thickness ranging from 0.125 inch to 0.145 inch and occupying 5% to 15% of the exterior surface of a core face area, the transition region encompassing the central
10 region and occupying 35% to 50% of the exterior surface of a core face area, the first peripheral region encompassing the transition region and occupying 40% to 55% of the exterior surface of the core face, the first peripheral region having a second thickness less than the first thickness and ranging from 0.075 inch to 0.110 inch, the transition region having a thickness that transitions from the first thickness to the second
15 thickness, the second peripheral region encompassing the first peripheral region and having a third thickness that ranges from 0.045 inch to 0.080 inch; and

a thin layer disposed on the exterior surface, the thin layer having a thickness of 0.005 inch to 0.100 inch, the thin layer having a plurality of scorelines thereon.

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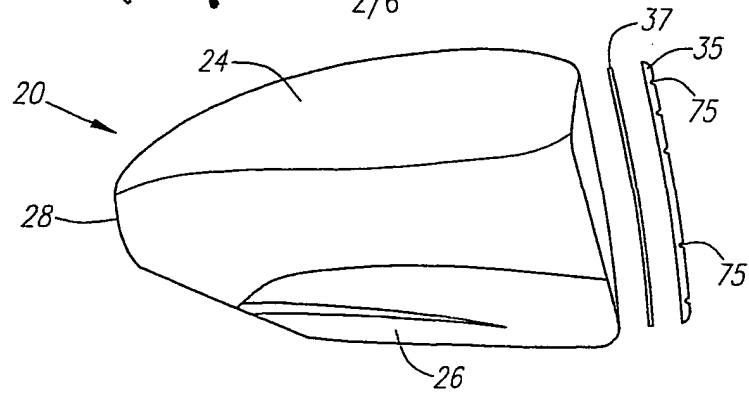


FIG. 3A

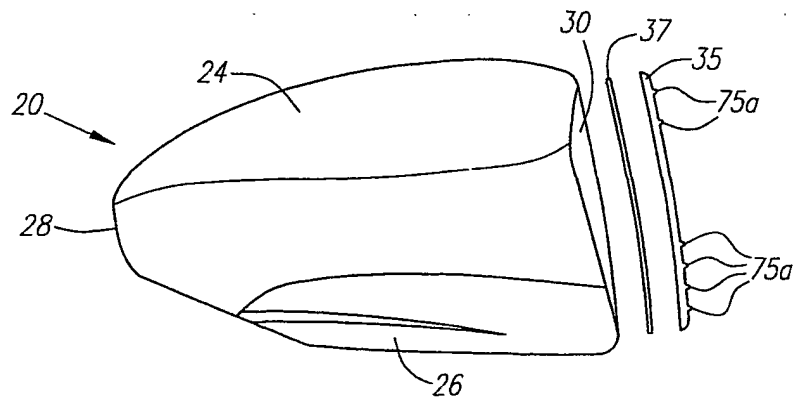


FIG. 3B

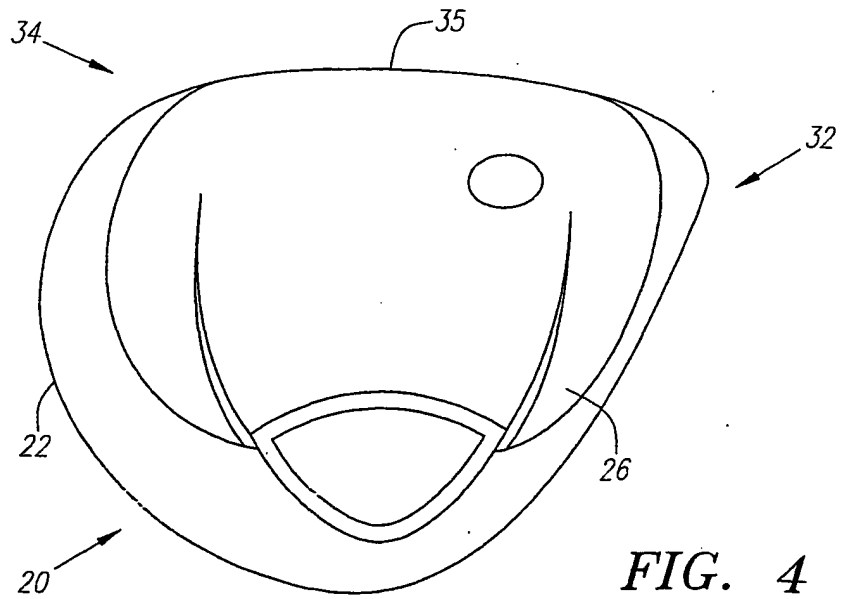
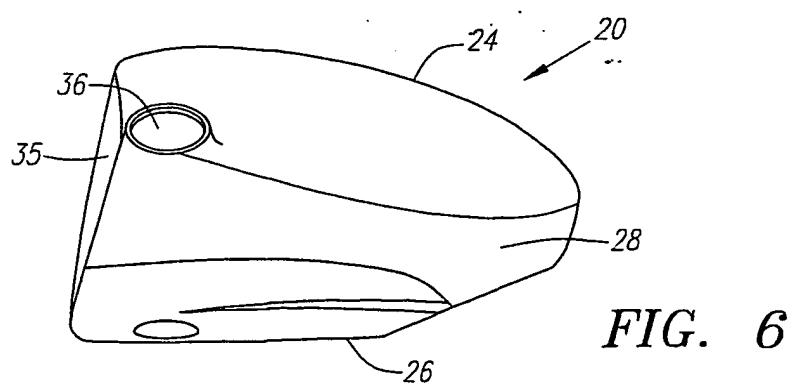
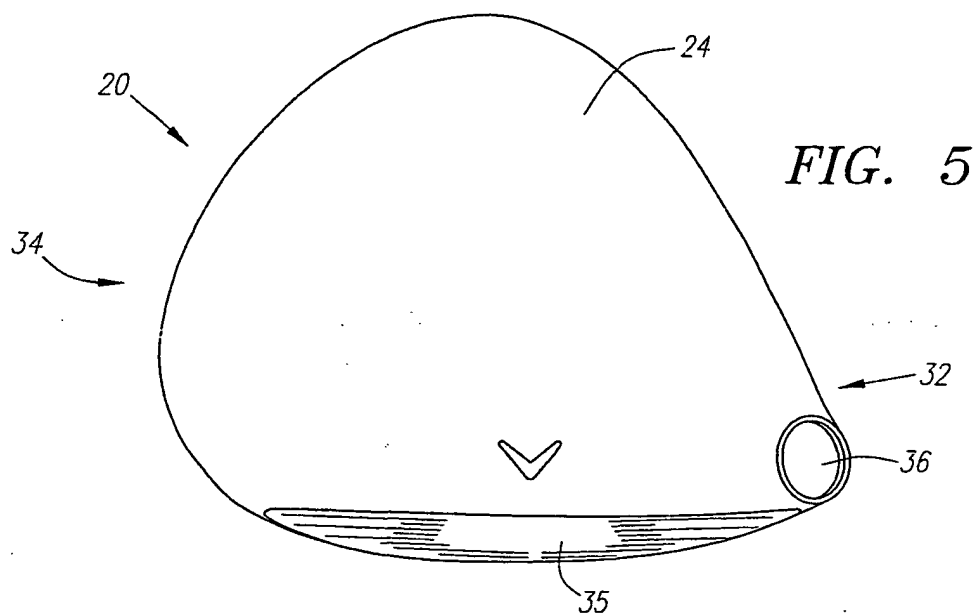


FIG. 4

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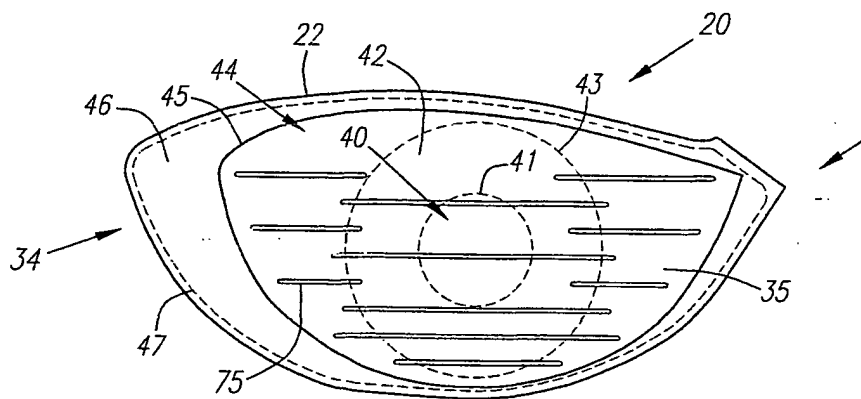


FIG. 7

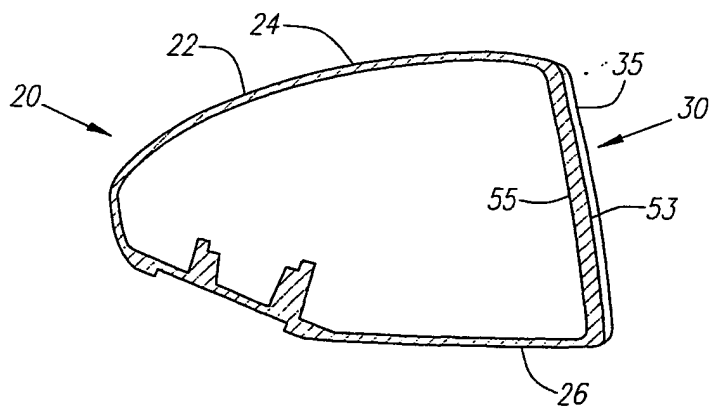


FIG. 8

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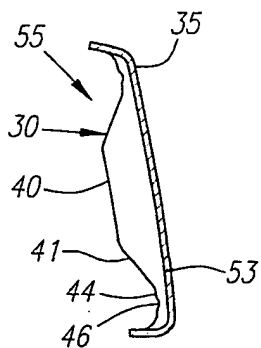


FIG. 9

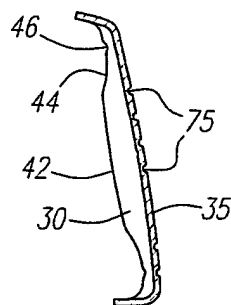


FIG. 10

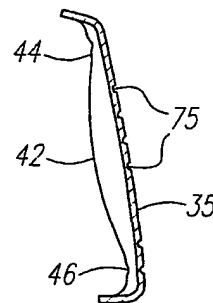


FIG. 11

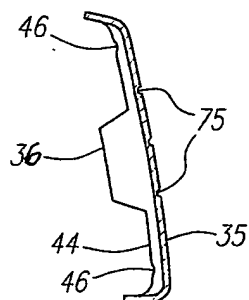


FIG. 12

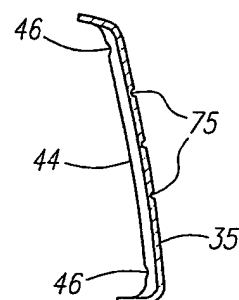


FIG. 13

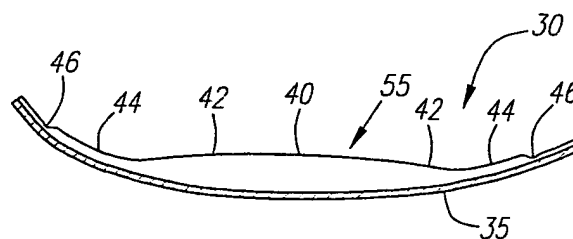


FIG. 14

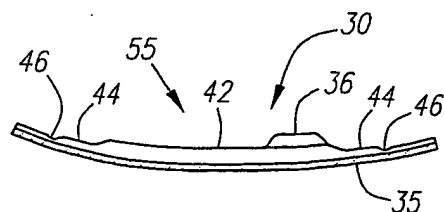


FIG. 15

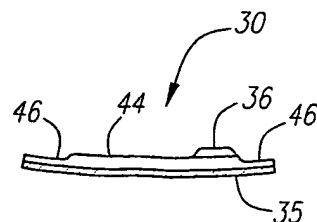


FIG. 16

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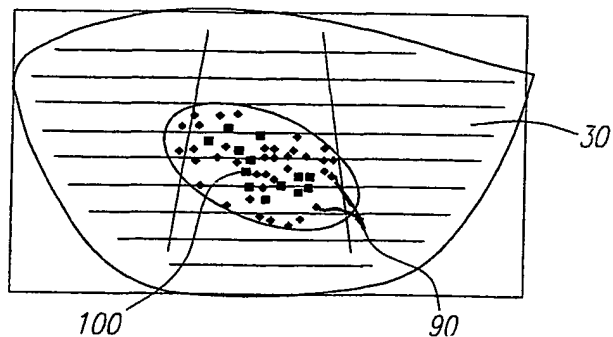


FIG. 17

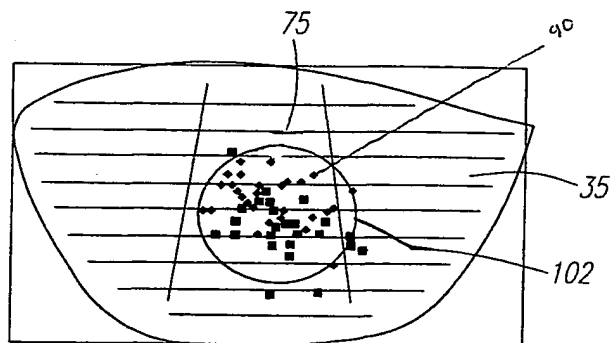


FIG. 18

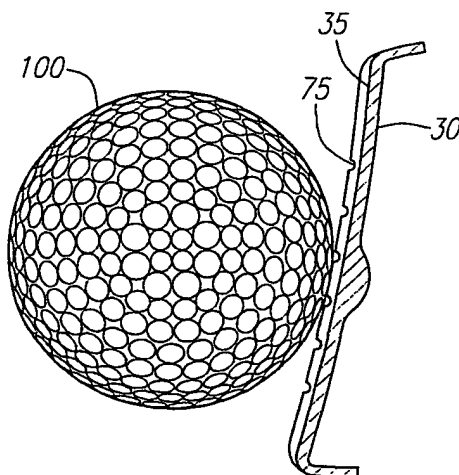


FIG. 19

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/US01/29597

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC(7) : A63B 53/04, 53/06, 53/08

US CL : 473/324, 329, 345, 290, 349, 350

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

U.S. : 473/324, 329, 345, 290, 349, 350

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X,E — Y,E	US 6,299,547 B1 (Kosmatka) 09 October 2001, col.5, lines 10-12, and 18-20, col. 4, lines 28-38, col. 3, lines 3-5.	1 — 4-5
Y	US 5,830,084 (Kosmatka) 03 November 1998, col. 4, lines 46-63, col. 1, lines 14-16	1-10
Y,P	US 6,152,833 (Werner et al.) 28 November 2000, col. 5, lines 39-48, col. 7, lines 59-67, col. 5, lines 40-45.	1-10
Y	US 6,093,116 (Hettinger et al.) 25 July 2000, col.3, lines 6-36	1-3, 6-7, 9-10
Y	US 2,034,936 (Barnhart) 15 July 1931, col. 2, lines 28-40, col. 3, lines 6-10 and 41-49	6-7, 10



Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.



See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents:	"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention
"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance	"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone
"E" earlier document published on or after the international filing date	"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art
"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)	"Z" document member of the same patent family
"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means	
"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed	

Date of the actual completion of the international search

12 NOVEMBER 2001

Date of mailing of the international search report

09 JAN 2002

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